



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# OXFORD.

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

---

THE friendly gentleman in our railway carriage who was good enough to care for my interest in the landscape between London and Oxford (I began to express it as soon as we got by a very broad, bad smell waiting our train, midway, in the region of some sort of chemical works) said he was going to Oxford for the Eights. Then we knew that we were going there for the Eights, too, though as to what the Eights are I have never been able to be explicit with myself to this day, beyond the general fact that they are intercollegiate boat-races and implicate Bumps, two of which we saw with satisfaction in due time. But while the towers of Oxford were growing from the plain, a petrified efflorescence of the past, lovelier than any new May-wrought miracle of leaf and flower, we had no thought but for Oxford, and Eights and Bumps were mere vocables no more resolvable into their separate significances than the notes of the jargonizing rooks flying over the fields, or the noises of the station where each of our passengers was welcomed by at least three sons or brothers, and kept from claiming somebody else's boxes in the confiding distributions from the luggage-vans. As our passengers were mostly mothers and sisters, their boxes easily outnumbered them, and if a nephew and cousin or next friend had lent his aid in their rescue in the worst cases, it could not have been superfluous. The ancient town is at other times a stronghold of learning, obedient to a tradition of cloistered men in whom the cloistered monk of other days still lingers, but at this happy time it was overflowed to its very citadel by a tide of feathered hats, of clinging and escaping scarfs, of fluffy skirts in all angelic colors; and I should not be true to that first impression of the meetings at the station, if I did not say that the meeters were quite lost, and well lost, in the multitude

of the met. When they issued together from the place these contributed their advantageous disproportion to the effect of the streets, from which they swept the proper university life into corners and doorways, and up alleys and against walls, before their advancing flood.

Our own friend, who, lief and dear as any son or brother or nephew or cousin of them all, came flying on the wings of his academic gown to greet us at the station, had in a wonderfully little while divined our baggage, and had it and us in an open carriage making a progress into the heart of the beautiful grove of towers, which, nearer to, we perceived was no petrification, but a living growth from the soul of the undying youth coming age after age to perpetuate the university there. We began at once to see the body of this youth chasing singly or plurally down the streets, in tasselled mortar-boards, and gowns clipped of their flow, to an effect of alpaca jackets. Youth can, or must, stand anything, and at certain hours of the morning and evening no undergraduate may show himself in Oxford streets without this abbreviated badge of learning, though the streets were that day so full of people thronging to the Eights and the Bumps that studious youth in the ordinary garb of the unstudious could hardly have awakened suspicion in the authorities. We were in fact, driving through a largeish town, peopled beyond its comfortable wont, and noisy with the rush of feet and wheels far frequenter and swifter than those which set its characteristic pace.

Our friend knew we were not, poor things, there for a tumult which we could have easily had in New York, or even in London, and he made haste to withdraw us from it up into a higher place at the top of the Radcliffe Library, where we could look down on all Oxford, with the tumult subsiding into repose under the foliage and amid the flowers of the college gardens. It is the well-known view which every one is advised by the guide-books to seize the first thing, and he could not have done better for us, even from his great love and lore of the place, than to point severally out each renowned roof and spire and tower which blent again for my rapture in a rich harmony with nothing jarring from the whole into any separately accentuated fact. I pretended otherwise, and I hope I satisfactorily seemed to know those tops and deeps one from another, when I ignorantly exclaimed, "Oh,

Magdalen, of course! Christ Church! And is that Balliol? And Oriel, of course; and Merton, and Jesus, and Wadham—really Wadham? And New College, of course! And is *that* Brasenose?"

I honestly affected to remember them from a first visit twenty years before, when in a cold September rain I wandered about among them with a soul dry-shod and warmed by an inner effulgence of joy in being there on any sort of terms. But I remembered nothing except the glory which nothing but the superior radiance of being there again in May could eclipse. What I remember now of this second sight of them will not let itself be put in words; it is the bird which sings in the bush, and alertly refuses to double its value by coming into the hand. I could not now take the most trusting reader up into that high place, and hope to abuse his innocence by any feigned knowledge of those clustering colleges. All is a blur of leafy luxuriance, probably the foliage of the garden trees which embower the colleges, but not so absolutely such that it does not seem the burgeoning and branching edifices themselves, a sumptuous Gothic suggestion, in stem and spray, of the stone-wrought beauty of the halls and chapels where nature might well have studied her effects of Perpendicular or Early English, or that spiritual Flamboyant in which she excels art. There remains from it chiefly a sense of flowery color which I suppose is from the nearer-to insistence of trees everywhere in bloom.

It was as if Oxford were decorated for the Eights by these sympathetic hawthorns and chestnuts, and fond lilacs, and the whole variety of kind, sweet shrubs which had hung out their blossoms to gladden the pretty eyes and noses of the undergraduates' visitors. We could not drive anywhere without coming upon some proof of the floral ardor; but perhaps I am embowering Oxford more than I ought with borrowed wreaths and garlands from the drive to the Norman church of Iffley where our friend took us, ostensibly because it could just be got in before lunch, but really because we needed some relief from the facts of Oxford which, stamped thickly, one upon another, made us inexhaustible palimpsests of precious impressions. I am sure that if another could get at my memory, and wash one record clear of another, there would reveal itself such a perfect history of what I saw and did as would constitute every beholder a partner of my ex-

periences. But this I cannot manage for myself, and must be as content as I can with revealing mere fragmentary glimpses of the fact, broken lines, shattered images, blurred colors. For instance, all I can get at, of that visit to the Norman church at Iffley, is the May morning air, with its sun and sweet, from which we passed to the gloom, richly chill, of the interior, and then from that again, into the sun and sweet, to have a swift look at the façade, with the dog-toothing of its arches, which I then for the first time received distinctly into my consciousness. A part of the precious concept, forever inseparable, is my recollection of the church wardens' printed prayer that I would not lean against the chain-fencing before the façade, and of my grief that I could not comply without failing of the view of it which I was there for: without leaning against that chain one cannot look up at the dog-toothing, and receive it into one's consciousness.

As often I have thought of asking my reader to revisit Oxford with me, I have fancied vividly possessing them of this or that distinctive fact, without regard to the sequences, but I find myself, poor slave of all that I have seen and known! following myself, step by step through the uneventful events in the order of their occurrence; and if my reader will not keep me company, after luncheon, in my stroll across fields and through garden ways beyond my friend's house to that affluent of the Isis whose real name is the Cherwell, and which calls itself the Char, I know not how he is to get to the point where the Isis becomes the Thames, and where we are to see the first of the Eights, and two of the Bumps together. For except by this stroll we cannot reach the pretty water, so full, so slow, so bright, so dark, where we are to take boat, and get down to the destined point on its smooth breast, with a thousand other boats of every device, but mainly, but overwhelmingly, punts. The craft were all pushed or pulled by their owners or their owners' guests, who were as serenely and sweetly patient with the problem of getting to the Eights or the Bumps in time, as if the affair were subjective, and might be delayed by an effort of the will in the various cases.

As with other public things in England this had such a quality of privacy that we seemed the only persons really concerned, and other people in other boats were as much figures painted in the landscape as the buttercups in the meadowy levels that stretched

on either hand at our point of departure, and presently, changed into knots of boskage, overhanging the dreamy lymph. But I shall not get into my picture the sense of the lush grasses, with those little yellow lamps, or those Perpendicular boles, with their Early English arches, or their Flamboyant leafage, any more than I shall get in the sense of the shore gleamily wetting its root-wrought earthen brinks, or bringing the weedy herbage down to drink of the little river. River it was, though so little, and as much in scale with the little continent it helps to water, as any Ohio or Mississippi of ours is with our measureless peninsula. There is also something in that English air, which, in spite of the centuries of taming to man's hand, leaves Nature her moods, her whims, of showing divinely and inalienably primitive, so that I had bewildering moments, on that sung and storied water, of floating on some wildwood stream of my Western boyhood. It has, so it appeared, its moments of savage treachery, and one still eddy where it lay smoothly smiling was identified as the point where two undergraduates had not very long ago been drowned. Sometimes the early or the later rains swell it to a flood, and spread it over those low pastures, in an image of the vaster deluges which sweep our immense stretches of river valley.

There was a kind of warm chill in the afternoon air, which bore all odors of wood and meadow, and transmitted the English voices with a tender distinctness. From point to point there were reaches of the water where we had quite a boat's length of it to ourselves, and again there were sharp turns where it narrowed to an impossible strait and the congested craft must have got by one another through the air. The people in the punts, and canoes, and boats, were proceeding at their leisure, or lying wilfully or forgetfully moored by the flat shores or under the mimic bluffs. They struck into one another where they found room enough to withdraw for the purpose, and they were constantly grinding gunwale against gunwale, with gentle murmurs of deprecation and soft-voiced forgivenesses which had almost the quality of thanks. Then, before we knew it we were gliding under Magdalen bridge past bolder shores, and so, into wider and opener waters where, with as little knowledge of ours, the Char had become, or was by way of becoming, the Thames which is the Isis. I believe it is still the Char where the bumps take place in the commodious expanses between the college barges tethered to

the grassy shores. These barges were only a little more conspicuously aflame and aflutter with bright hats and parasols and volatile skirts than the shores; and they were all one fluent delight of sisters and cousins. In a path by the thither brink from our barge, there ran, soon after we had taken our first cups of tea, a cry of undergraduates, heralding the first of the two shells which came rowing past us. Then, almost ere I was aware of it the bow of a shell which was behind touched the stern of the shell which was before, and the first bump had been achieved. The thing had been so lightly and quickly done that the mere fact of the bump had not fully passed from the eye to the mind, when a glory wholly unexpected by me involved us: the shell which had made the bump belonged to our college, or at least the college to which our barge belonged. Shining in the reflected light, we rowed back up the Char to the point of our departure, and in the long, leisurely twilight found our first day in Oxford drawing on to night in the fragrant meadow.

Was it this night or the next that I dined in hall? There were several dinners in hall, and I may best be indefinite as to time as well as place. All civilized dinners are much alike everywhere, from soup to coffee, and it is only in certain academic formalities that a dinner in hall at Oxford differs from another banquet. One of these which one may mention as most captivating to the fancy fond of finding poetry in antique usage was the passing from meat in the large hall, portraited round the carven and panelled walls with the effigies of the college celebrities and dignities, into a smaller and cozier room, where the spirit of the gadding vine began its rambles up and down the glossy mahogany; and then into a third place where the fragrant cups and tubes fumed in the wedded odors of coffee and tobacco. If I remember, we went from the first to the last successively under the open heaven; but perhaps you do not always so, though you always make the transit, and could not imaginably smoke where you ate or drank.

Once, when the last convivial delight was exhausted, and there was a loath parting at the door in the grassy quadrangle under the mild heaven, where not even a star intruded, I had a realizing sense of what Oxford could mean to some youth who comes to it in eager inexperience from such a strange, far land as ours, and first fully imagines it. Or perhaps it was rather in one of

the lambent mornings when I strayed through the gardened closes too harshly called quadrangles that I had the company of this supposititious student, and wreaked myself in his sense of measureless opportunity. Nor opportunity alone, but opportunity graced with all the charm of tradition, and weighted with rich scholarly convention, the outgrowth of the patient centuries blossoming at last in a flower from whose luminous chalice he should drink the hoarded wisdom of the past. I said to myself that if I were such a youth my heart would go near to break with the happiness of finding myself in that environment and privileged to all its possibilities, with nothing but myself to hinder me from their utmost effect. Perhaps I made my imaginary youth too imaginative, when I was dowering him with my senile regrets in the form of joyful expectations. It is said the form in which the spirit of the university dwells is so overmastering for some that they are fain to escape from it, to renounce their fellowships, and go out from those hallowed shades into the glare of the profane world gladly to battle "in the midst of men and day."

Even of the American youth who resort to it, not all add shining names to the effulgent records of the place. They are indeed not needed, though they may be patriotically missed from the roll in which the native memories shine in every sort of splendor. It fatigues you at last to read the inscriptions which meet the eye wherever it turns. The thousand years of English glory stretch across the English sky from 900 to 1900 in a luminous tract where the stars are sown in multitudes outnumbering those of all the other heavens; and in Oxford above other places one needs a telescope to distinguish them. The logic of any commemoration of the mighty dead is that they will animate the living to noble endeavor for like remembrance. But where the mighty dead are in such multitude perhaps it is not so. Perhaps in the presence of their records the desire of distinction fails, and it is the will to do great things for the things' sake rather than the doer's which remains. The hypothesis might account for the prevailing impersonality of Oxford, the incandescent mass from which nevertheless from time to time a name detaches itself and flames a separate star in the zenith.

What strikes one with the sharpest surprise is not the memories



of distant times, however mighty, but those of yesterday, of this forenoon, in which the tradition of their glory is continued. The aged statesman whose funeral eulogy has hardly ceased to echo in the newspapers, the young hero who fell in the battle of the latest conquest, died equally for the honor of England, and both are mourned in bronze which has not yet lost its golden lustre beside the inscriptions forgetting themselves in the time-worn lettering of the tablets on the walls, or the brasses in the floors. Thick as the leaves in Vallombrosa, they strew the solemn place, but in the religious calm of those chapels and halls there is no rude blast to scatter them, or to disturb the quiet in which for a few hundred or a few thousand years they may keep themselves from the universal oblivion.

When one strays through those aisles and under those arches, one fancies them almost as conscious of their sacred eld as one is one's self. Then suddenly one comes out into the vivid green light of a grassy quadrangle, or the flowery effulgence of a garden, where the banks of blossomed bushes are pushed back of the beds of glowing annuals by the velvety sward unrolled over spaces no more denied to your foot than the trim walks that wander beyond their barrier, under the ivied walls, and to and from the foot-worn thresholds. To the eye it is all very soft and warm, and the breadths of enclosing masonry, the arched or pillared gables, the towers starting on their skyward climb, seem to bathe themselves in sun or cool themselves in shade alike mellow and mild. There are other senses that more truly take account of the thermometer and report it in very glowing moments as not registering much above the middle fifties. But you answer in excuse of it that it is so sincere, just as you ascribe to its scrupulous truthfulness the failure of the English temperament ever to register anything like summer heat. We boil in the torridity of an adoptive climate, but our ancestral suns were no hotter than those of the English are now; and where we have kept their effect in some such cold storage as that, say, of Boston, we probably impart no greater heat to the stranger. The spiritual temperature of Oxford, indeed, is much that of Old Cambridge, that Old Cambridge, Massachusetts, when it was far older, forty years ago, than it is now. Very likely, the atmospheres of all capitals of learning are of the same degree of warmth; and of a responsive salubrity, in the absence of malarial microbes. At

any rate I was at once naturalized to Oxford through my former citizenship in Old Cambridge, and in a pleasing confusion found myself in both places at once with an interval of forty years foreshortened in a joint past and present.

The note of impersonality is struck in both places, but not so prevalently in Old Cambridge as in Oxford, where the genius of the place at some moment of divine inspiration,

“Smote the chord of self, that trembling, passed in music out of sight.”

As in the political frame of things the powerful English individualities pronounce themselves strongest by their abnegation to a patriotic ideal, so in this finer and higher England, this England of the mind, what chiefly impresses the stranger is that mighty accord, that impersonal potency, which is the sum of the powerful wills, intellects, spirits severally lost in its collectivity. The master of this college, the president of that, the dean of the other, they all unite in effacing themselves, and letting the university, which is their composite personality, stand for them. As far as possible they refuse to stand for it, and the humor of the pose is carried to the verge of whim in the custom which bars the Chancellor of the University from ever returning to Oxford after that first visit which he makes upon his appointment. My imagination does not rise to a height like his, but of all accessible dignities there seems to me none so amiable as the headship of one of those famous colleges. I will not, since I need not, choose among them, and very likely if one had one's choice, one might find a crumpled rose-leaf in the cushioned seat. Yet one could well bear the pain for the sake of the pleasure and the pride of feeling one's self an agency of that ancient and venerable impersonality and of denying one's self the active appearance. Scholarship, when it does not degenerate into authorship, is the most negative of human things. It silently feeds itself full of learning, which is as free again to the famine of future scholarship; and in a world where pretty nearly all the soft warm things of privilege are so cruelly wrong, I can think of none so nearly innocent as those which lap the love of learning round in such an immortal home of study as Oxford. It is there so fitly housed, so properly served, so respectfully fed, so decorously clad, so beautifully environed, that it might almost dream itself a type of what should always and everywhere be an emanation

of the literature to which it shall return after its earthly avatar, and rest, a blessed ghost, between the leaves of some fortunate book on an unvisited shelf of a vast silentious and oblivious library.

There is memory enough of lunches, and dinners, and teas, in halls and on lawns and in gardens, but as the reader was not asked, so cannot he in self-respect and propriety go. But there was one of the outdoor affairs of which I may give him at least a picture-postal-card glimpse. No one's abnegated personality will be infringed, not even the university need shrink from the intrusion if the garden of no college is named. The reader is to stand well out of the way at a Gothic window looking on the green where the guests come and go under an afternoon heaven which constantly threatens to shower, and never showers; where the sun indeed appears just often enough to agree with the garden trees that it will add indescribably to the effect if their lengthening shadows can be cast over the sward with those of the Gothic tops around. A little breeze crisps the air, and the birds sing among the gossiping leaves of the hawthorns and of the laburnums. One great chestnut stands elect, apart, dense with spiky blossoms from the level of its lowest spreading boughs to the topmost peak of its massive cone. Everywhere is the gracious architecture in which the mouldering Oxford stone, whether it is old or new, puts on the common antiquity.

I will not say that all the colleges seem crumbling to ruin, but the scaly and scabrous complexion of the surfaces is the impression remaining from the totality. The decay into which the stone almost instantly falls is sometimes rather dreadful to the casual glance in the plinths of those philosophers and sages about the Sheldonian Theatre, where the heads seem to be dropping away in a mortal decay. I believe they are renewed from time to time when they become too dreadful, but always in the same stone; and I do not know that I would have it otherwise in the statues or structures of Oxford. Where newness in any part would seem upstart and vulgar, every part looks old, whether it is of the last year or the first year. The smoke has blackened it, the damp has painted it a dim green; the latent disintegration of the stone has made its way to the surface, which hangs in warped scales or drops in finer particles. One would not have a different material used for building; brick or marble would

affront the sensibilities, and deny the wisdom of that whole English system, in which reform finds itself authorized in usage, and innovation hesitates till it can put on the likeness of precedent.

It is interesting in Oxford to see how the town and the university grow in and out of each other. Like other towns of the Anglo-Saxon civilization it is occasional, accidental, anarchical, the crass effect of small personal ambitions and requisitions. In the course of so many centuries its commonness could not always fail of a picturesque quaintness, and perhaps it only seems without beauty or dignity because the generous collective spirit working itself out in the visible body of the university has created more of both than any other group of edifices in the world embodies. Those shapeless, shambling, casual streets, with their scattered dwellings and their clustering shops, find by necessity a common centre, without impressiveness or distinction. But in their progress or arrival, weakly widening here, or helplessly narrowing there, they often pass under the very walls of the venerable and beautiful edifices which constitute at once the real Oxford and the ideal Oxford, alike removed from the material Oxford of the town. Sometimes it is a wall that flanks a stretch of the commonplace thoroughfares; sometimes a gate or a portal under a tower giving into the college quadrangle from which you pass by inner ways beneath inner walls to an inmost garden, where the creepers cling to the windows and the porches, or a space of ivied masonry suns itself above the odorous bushes and the daisied sward. It would be hard to choose among these homes of ancient lore; but happily one is not obliged to choose. They are all there for the looking, and one owns them, an inalienable possession for life. One would not will them away, if one could; they must remain forever to enrich the pious beholder with the vision which no words can impart.

The heart of the pilgrim softens in the retrospect even toward that municipal Oxford which forms the setting of their beauty, as a mass of common rock may shapelessly enclose a cluster of precious stones, crystals which something next to conscious life has deposited through the course of the slow ages in the rude matrix. He relents in remembering pleasant suburbs, through which the unhurried trams will bear him past tasteful houses, set in embowered spaces of greensward, and on past pretty parks into the level country where there are villas among grounds that

will presently broaden into the acreage of ancestral seats, halls, manors, and, for all I know, castles. Even the immediate town has moods of lurking in lanes apart from the busier streets, and offering the consolation of low, stone dwellings faced by college walls, and dedicated to the uses of furnished lodgings. If it should be your fortune to find your sojourn in one of these, you may look down from your front window perhaps into the groves that shade Addison's Walk; or you may step from your back door into a grassy nook where a tower or bastion of the old city wall will be hiding itself in a mesh of ivy. The lane before may be dusty with traffic and the garden behind may be damp with the rains that have never had intervals long enough to dry out of it; but the rooms with their rocking floors will be neatly kept, and if they happen to be the rooms of a reading or sporting undergraduate, sublet in some academic interval, you will find the tokens of his tastes and passions crowding the mantels and the walls. He has confided them with the careless faith of youth to your chance reverence; he has not even withheld the photographs which attest his preference in actresses, or express a finer fealty in the faces self-evidently of mother or sister or even cousin, or some one farther and nearer yet.

It is everywhere much alike, that spirit of studious youth, at least in our common race, and I do not believe that if I had met a like number of Harvard men, going and coming in the mortar-boards and cropped gowns, in those quadrangles or gardens, I should have known them from the Oxford men I actually saw. They might have looked sharper, tenser, less fresh and less fair, not so often blue of eye and blond of hair, more mixed and differenced; but they would have had the same effect of being chosen for their golden opportunity by fortune, and the same gay ignorance of being favored above other youth. If one came to closer quarters and had to ask some chance question, the slovenlier speech of the Harvard men would have betrayed them in their answer, for even our oldest university has not yet taken thought of how her children shall distinguish themselves from our snuffling mass by the beauty of utterance which above any other beauty discriminates between us and the English. It is said that the youth of the parent stock are younger than our youth; but I know nothing as to this; and I could not say that their manners were better, except as the manners of

the English are in being simpler. They are not better in being suppler: I should say that as life passed with him the American limbered and the Englishman stiffened, and that the first gained and the last lost in the power to imagine another which they both perhaps equally possessed in their shy nonage, and which chiefly, if not solely, enables men to be comfortable to their fellows. But here, as everywhere, I wish to be understood as making an inference vastly disproportioned to the facts observed. The stranger in any country must reflect that its people seem much less interested in themselves and their belongings than he is, and from the far greater abundance of their knowledge have far less to say of them. This may very well happen to a traveller from an old land among us; his zest for our novelty may fatigue us; just as possibly our zest for his antiquity may put us at odds with him. The spirit seeks in either case a common ground of actuality, achronic, ubiquitous, where it may play with its fellow soul among the human interests which are eternally and everywhere the same.

What these are I should be far from trying to say, but I think I may venture to recur to my memories of the mute music of Harvard for the dominant of the unheard melodies of Oxford. The genius of the older university seemed much the same as that of the younger under the stress of ceremonial, and to have the quality of that stern acquiescence in the inevitable on the occasions of Commemoration Day that I remembered from Commencement Days in the past. The submission did not break into the furtively imparted jest which relieves the American temperament under fire, but the feeling of obedience to usage, the law-abiding instinct of the race, was the same in both. From both a gala pride was equally remote; the confident expectation of living through it, and not even a martyr exultance in the ordeal, was doubtless what sustained the participants. We have simplified form, but the English have simplified the mood of observing form, and in the end it comes to the same thing in them and in us. But there the parallel ceases. There is a riches of incident in the observance of Commemoration Day at Oxford, for which the sum of all like events in our academic world is but an accumulated poverty. We could not if we would emulate the continuous splendors of the time, for we lack not only the tradition but the environment in which to

honor the tradition. If it were possible so to abolish space that Harvard and Yale and Princeton, say, and Columbia could locally unite, and be severally the colleges of one university, and assemble their best in architecture for its embodiment, something might be imaginable of their collectivity like what involuntarily, inevitably happens at Oxford on Commemoration Day. Then the dinners in hall on the eve and in the evening, the lunches in the college gardens immediately following the academical events of the Sheldonian Theatre, the architectural beauty and grandeur forming the avenue for the progress of the Chancellor and all his train of diversified doctors, actual and potential, might be courageously emulated, but never could be equalled or approached. Our emulation would want the color of the line which at Oxford comes out of the past in the bravery of the scarlets and crimsons and violets and purples which men used to wear, and before which the iridescent fashions of the feminine spectators paled their ineffectual hues. Again, the characteristic surrender of personality contributed to the effect. In that procession whatever were the individual advantages or disadvantages of looks or statures, all were clothed on with the glory of the ancient university which honored them; it was the university which passively or actively was embodied in them; and their very distinction would in a little while be merged in her secular splendor.

Of course we have only to live on a few centuries more and our universities can eclipse this splendor, though we shall still have the English start of a thousand years to overcome in this as in some other things. We cannot doubt of the result, but in the mean time we must recognize the actual fact, and I will own that I do not see how we could ever offer a *coup d'œil* which should surpass that of the supreme moments in the Sheldonian Theatre when the Chancellor stood up in his high place, in his deeply gold-embroidered gown of black, and accepted each of the candidates for the university's degrees, and then, after a welcoming clasp of the hand, waved him to the benches which mystically represented her hospitality. The circle of the interior lent itself with unimagined effect to the spectacle, and swam with faces, with figures innumerable, representing a world of birth, of wealth, of deed, populous beyond reckoning from our simple republican experience. The thronged interior stirred like some vast organism with the rustle of stuffs, the agitation of fans, the

invisible movement of feet; but the master note of it was the young life which is always the breath of the university. How much or little the undergraduates were there it would not do for a chance alien spectator to say. That they were there to do what they would with the occasion in the tradition of an irresponsible license might be affirmed, but it must be equally owned that they generously forbore to abuse their privilege. They cheered the Candidates, some more, some less, but there was, to my knowledge, none of the guying of which one hears much, beyond a lonely pun upon a name that offered itself with irresistible temptation. The pun itself burst like an involuntary sigh from the heart of youth, and the laugh that followed it was of like quality with it.

Then, the degrees being conferred, each with distinctive praise and formal acceptance in a Latinity untouched by modern conjecture of Roman speech, there ensued a Latin oration, and then English essays and speeches from the graduates—thriftily represented, that the time should not be wasted, by extracts—and then a prize poem which did not perhaps distinguish itself so much in generals as in particulars from other prize poems of the past. If it had been as wholly as it was partially good—and there were passages that caught and kept the notice—it would have been a breach of custom out of tune and temper, as much as if the occasional Latinity had been of the new Roman accent instead of that old English enunciation as it was of right, there where Latin had never quite ceased to be a spoken language. All was of usage; the actors and the spectators of the scene were bearing the parts which like actors and like spectators had ancestrally borne so often that they might have seemed to themselves the same from the first century, the first generation, without sense of actuality. This sense might imaginably have been left, in any sort of poignancy, to the accidental alien, who in proportion as he was penetrated with it would feel it a contravention of the spirit, the taste, of the event.

I try for something that is not easily said, and being said at all, seems over-said; and I shrink from the weightiest impression of Oxford which one could receive, and recall those light touches of her magic, which as I feel them again make me almost wish that there had been no Eights, no Commemoration Day in my experience. Of course I shall fail to make the reader sensible of



the preciousness of a walk from the Char through a sort of market flower-garden, where when I asked my way to a friend's house a kindly consensus of gardeners helped me miss the short cut; but I hope he will not be quite without the pleasure I knew in another row on that stream. Remembering my prime joys in its navigation, I gratefully accepted an invitation to a second voyage which was delayed till we could be sure it was not going to rain. Then we started for the boat where it lay not far off under a clump of trees, and where we were delayed in their seasonable shelter by a thunder-gust; but the clouds broke away and the sun shone, so that when the boat was bailed dry, we could embark in a light shower, and keep on our way unmolested by the fine drizzle that was really representing fine weather. If I had been native to the impulsive climate I should not have noticed these swift vicissitudes, and as it was I noticed them only to enjoy them on the still, bank-full water, where I floated with a delight not really qualified by the question whether the pond-lilies which padded it in places were of the fragrant family of our own pond-lilies. I was pursued by a kindred curiosity in regard to many other leaves and blossoms till one Sunday morning, when I found myself interrogating a shrub by the sunny walk of a college garden, it came to me that my curiosity was out of taste. The bush was not there specifically, but as an herbaceous expression of the University, and I had no more right to pass certain bounds with it in my curiosity than I would have had to push any scholar of the place to an assertion of personality where he would have preferred to remain collective.

What riches of personality lay behind the collectivity I ought not, if I knew, to say. Again I take refuge from the reader's quest, which I cannot help feeling, in the indefinite attempt to suggest it by saying that the collective tone is that of Old Cambridge, or more strictly, of Harvard. I remember that once a friend, coming in high June straight to Old Cambridge after a brief ocean interval from Oxford, noted the resemblance. As we walked under a Gothic archway of our elms, past the dooryards full of syringas and azaleas, with

"Old Harvard's scholar-factories red,"

showing on the other hand in the college enclosures, he said it was all very like Oxford. He must have felt the moral likeness, the

spiritual likeness, as I did in Oxford, for physical or meteorological likeness there is none absolutely. It is something in the ambient ether, in the temperament, in the unity of high interests, in the mystical effluence from minds moving with a certain dirigibility in the upper regions, but controlled by invisible ties, in each case, to a common centre. It is the prevalence of scholarship, which characterizes the respective municipalities and which holds the civil bodies in a not ungraceful, not ungrateful, subordination.

Something of the hereditary grudge between town and gown descended to Harvard from the English centres of learning; but the prompt assertion of town government as the sole police force forbade with us the question of jurisdictions which it is said still confuses the parties with a feeling of enmity at Oxford. The war of fists following the war of swords and daggers, which in the earliest times left the dead of both sides in the streets after some mortal clash, and kept each college a stronghold, even after that war had no longer a stated or formal expression, is forever past, but still the town and the gown in their mutual dependence hold themselves aloof in mutual antipathy. So I was told, but probably on both sides the heritage of dislike resides only in the youthful breasts, and is of the quality of those ideals which perpetuate hazing in our colleges, or which among boys pass forms of mischief and phases of superstition along on a certain level of age. All customs and usages are presently uninteresting as one observes them from the outside, and can be precious on the inside only as they are endeared by association. What is truly charming is some expression of the characteristic spirit such as in Oxford forbids one of the colleges to part in fee with a piece of ground on which a certain coveted tree stands, but which allows it to lease that beautiful feature of the landscape to a neighboring college. A thing like that is really charming, and has forever the freshness of a whimsical impulse, where whimsical impulses of many sorts must have abounded without making any such memorable sign.

In the reticence of the place all sorts of silent character will have been accumulating through the centuries until now the sum of it must be prodigious. But that is a kind of thing which if one has any direct knowledge of it one feels to be a kind of confidence, and which one lets one's conjecture play about, in the

absence of knowledge, very guardedly. For my part I prefer to leave quite to the reader's imagination the charming traits of the acquaintance I would fain have made my friends. Sometimes they were of difficult conversation, but not more so than certain Old Cambridge men, whom I remembered from my youth; the studious life is nowhere favorable to the cultivation of the smaller talk; but now that so many of the Fellows are married the silence is less unbroken, and the teas, if not the dinners, recur in a music which is not the less agreeable for the prevalence of the soprano or the contralto note. It seemed to me that there were a good many teas, outdoors when it shone and indoors when it rained, but there were never enough, and now I feel there were all too few. They had the *entourage* which the like social dramas cannot have for yet some centuries in our centres of learning; between the tinkle of the silver and the light clash of the china one caught the muted voices of the past speaking from the storied architecture, or the immemorial trees, or even the secular sward underfoot. But one must not suppose that the lawns which are velvet to one's tread are quite voluntarily velvet. I was once sighing enviously to a momentary host and saying of his turf that nothing but the incessant play of the garden-hose could keep the grass in such vernal green with us, when he promptly answered that the garden-hose had also its useful part in the miracle of his own lawn. I dared not ask if the lawn-mower likewise lent its magic; that would have been going too far. Or at least I thought so; and in the midst of the surrounding reticences I always felt it was better not to push the bounds of knowledge.

There is so much passive erudition, hived from the flowers of a thousand summers in such a place of learning, that I felt the chances were that if the stranger came there conscious of some of his own little treasure of honey, he would find it a few thin drops beside the rich stores of any first apiarist to whom he opened it. In that long, long quiet, that illimitable opportunity, that generously defended leisure, the scholarship is not only deep, but it is so wide that it may well include the special learning of the comer, and he may hear that this or that different don who is known for a master in a certain kind has made it his recreation to surpass in provinces where the comer's field shrinks to parochial measure. How many things they keep to them-

selves at Oxford, it must remain part of one's general ignorance not to know, and it is more comfortable not to inquire. But out of the sense of their guarded, their hidden, lore may spring the habit of referring everything to the university, which represents them as far as they can manage not to represent it. They may have imaginably outlived our raw passion of doing, and have become serenely content with being. This is a way of saying an illanguagible thing, and, of course, oversaying it.

The finer impressions of such a place—there is no other such in the world unless it be Cambridge, England, or Old Cambridge, Massachusetts,—escape the will to impart them. The coarser ones are what I have been giving the reader, and trying to pass off upon him in their fragility for something subtle. If one could have stayed the witchery of an instant of twilight in a college quadrangle, or of morning sunshine in a college garden, or of a glimpse of the High Street, with the academic walls and towers and spires richly foreshortened in its perspective, or of the beauty of some meadow widening to the level Isis, or the tender solemnity of a long-drawn aisle of trees leading to the stream under the pale English noon, and could now transfer the spell to another, something worth while might be done. But short of this endeavor is vain. There was a walk, which I should like to distinguish from others, all delightful, where we passed in a grassy field over an old battle-ground of the Parliamentarians and the Royalists, and saw traces of the old lager-heads, the earth-works in which the hostile camps pushed closer and closer to each other, and left the word “loggerheads” to their language. But I do not now find this very typical, and I am rather glad that the details of my sojourn are so inextricably interwoven that I need not try to unravel the threads which glow so rich a pattern in my memory.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.